



E957

22  
23  
24

*Volume 10*  
*Love Tales of Cambodia*  
*and Songs of the*  
*Love Nights of Lao*



“  
“  
“  
“  
“

E A S T E R N   L O V E

LOVE TALES OF CAMBODIA  
AND SONGS OF THE  
LOVE NIGHTS OF LAO

ENGLISH VERSIONS BY  
E. POWYS MATHERS

\*

VOLUME X

JOHN RODKER  
FOR SUBSCRIBERS  
LONDON 1929



*for*  
J. B.

**MADE IN ENGLAND**

THIS EDITION OF LOVE TALES OF  
CAMBODIA AND SONGS OF THE LOVE  
NIGHTS OF LAO, BEING VOLUME IO OF  
“EASTERN LOVE,” IS HERE TRANSLATED  
INTO ENGLISH FOR THE FIRST TIME BY  
E. POWYS MATHERS. THE EDITION OF  
1,000 COPIES ON ALL RAG PAPER WAS  
PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY AND SONS,  
LTD., BUNGAY, SUFFOLK. THE COPPER  
PLATE ENGRAVINGS ARE BY HESTER SAINS-  
BURY AND HAVE BEEN HAND PRINTED  
AND HAND COLOURED BY MESSRS. A.  
ALEXANDER AND SONS, LTD. FOR THE  
NUMBER OF THIS SET SEE VOLUME I



---

---

## CONTENTS

- How not to Treat a Son-in-Law* 1  
*Popusnokar and the Lingam* 16  
*Sanselkey* 19  
*Popusnokar and the Girl's Mother* 51  
*Kung the Courageous* 54  
*Popusnokar and the Pan-Flutes* 62  
*A Woman's Artifice* 65  
*Notes* 75



---

---

*How not to treat a Son-in-law*

IT IS SAID THAT THERE WAS ONCE AN OLD MAN and an old woman who had a daughter of really remarkable beauty. In what land did they live ? I do not know. This is a tale that has been handed down from mouth to mouth till it came to me.

These two old people had made an oath that they would only give their daughter to a suitor who could continuously refrain from swearing.

A young man of excellent appearance came to ask for the hand of their daughter, and they said to him :

‘Yes, we will give her to you, never fear ; but you must enter our service and be obedient to us.\* If you are capable of refraining for ever from swearing, you shall have her. We tell you our conditions in advance, so that you may not accuse us of being tricksters if you fail.’

‘I can very easily abstain from swearing,’ answered the young man, ‘and I am ready to do all you wish and to obey you in everything.’

‘That is well,’ said the father. ‘Come here to-morrow morning and enter my service.’

Next day the old man had a meal prepared by his daughter for her lover and, when the latter had eaten, said :

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

‘ Dear son-in-law, take the buffaloes and plough the rice-field. You must labour until those stones you see on the side of the path groan out aloud. Then you may unyoke.’

The young man yoked the buffaloes to the plough and set to work. He laboured from dawn to noon, but the stones by the side of the path would not groan. The buffaloes could go no further, but the stones remained silent. The youth was very warm and very hungry, so he cried :

‘ Why will you not groan, you damned stones ? ’ He only swore this single oath, but the old man, who had been hidden behind the stones, came forth, saying :

‘ It is well. Unyoke the buffaloes and go your way. I refuse you my daughter since you cannot refrain from swearing.’

The young man unfastened the animals and then took himself off in great disgust.

Soon afterwards another youth presented himself, and the old man spoke to him as to his predecessor. But this young man was both malicious and cunning ; he went to plough in the field, taking a packet of rice with him. When he had laboured until the sun was high in its course, he halted the buffaloes and ate, and then resumed his work.

Though it was past noon the stones had not

### *How not to treat a Son-in-law*

yet groaned. The buffaloes were wearied out and could do no more. The young man approached the stones, saying :

‘Groan, dear stones. The buffaloes can no more. Have pity on them. It does not matter about me, for I have eaten ; I can easily go on working till nightfall. But have compassion on these buffaloes ; they are poor dumb animals, and also they belong to my excellent father-in-law.’

All his supplications failed to fetch a groan from the stones, but he was careful not to swear, for he suspected that the old man lay somewhere in hiding to overhear him. For a long time he went on imploring the stones, and at last the father, seeing his buffaloes at the end of their strength and pitying them because they were his own, himself began to groan from behind the rocks. At once the young man unyoked the beasts and betook himself to his father-in-law’s house, where the daughter cooked dinner for him. At nightfall the old man dismissed him, saying :

‘Return home, my dear child, and come back to-morrow morning.’

The young man took his leave, but when night had fully fallen he came as stealthily as a wolf and stationed himself beneath the house\* to hear what the husband might say to his wife.

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

Now this is what he heard :

‘ That young man knows how to keep from swearing, but he is ill-built and would not suit our daughter. Let us find some way to infuriate him and make him swear, so that we can refuse her to him.’

‘ That is easy,’ answered the woman. ‘ Tomorrow you must get into a sack and put rice in another. In the morning I will tell him that you have gone to cut wood in the mountain and bid him carry the two sacks to the very top. The burden will be much too heavy for him ; he will fly into a rage and swear. You will hear him from your sack, and can then dismiss him.’

After this conversation the parents of the young girl went to sleep ; but the youth had heard all. At daybreak he went to resume his service with his future parents. The woman showed him two sacks fastened with a stick through the corners, and said :

‘ My dear child, your father has gone to cut wood in the mountain. He told me to bid you take this load of rice and follow him as quickly as possible. He set forth fasting, before it was light. Carry these two sacks to the top of the mountain and prepare a meal for your father.’

The young man took the load and departed.

## *How not to treat a Son-in-law*

When he came to the foot of the mountain, he began to climb ; but his load was intolerable and he came down again.

As he walked, he exclaimed aloud :

‘ Alas, my dear father-in-law will be hungry. But the rice is so heavy that I cannot go any faster. Yet even if the fine old man blames me and curses me, I will accept all he says without a murmur.’

By this time he was well back into the plain, and had espied a patch of very dry grass. He set down his burden in the middle of this, and then walked off. But he returned at once, without making a single sound, and set fire to the grass all round the sacks. The old man was hemmed in by flames ; the heat came to him and he trembled with terror lest he should be burnt alive. But he could not get out of the sack.

Then the youth pretended to run back from a long way off, and cried :

‘ Who has lighted a fire to burn my rice ? How can I save it ? It is in the midst of a furnace. I cannot get near it.’

He stayed outside the circle of the flames until the fire was almost upon the sacks ; then he leaped forward and dragged his burden out of danger ; but not before the old man was covered with burns. Finally, he undid the sacks and,

## *Tales of Cambodia*

discovering his father-in-law in this sorry state, called out with feigned surprise :

‘ Alas, my dear father, why did you not warn me ? You very nearly lost your life in the flames. That would have left my dear mother-in-law a widow ! ’

The old man saw that he had been duped and was very angry ; but he could think of nothing to do. He rose and returned limping to his house. For the rest of the day he stayed on his bed, caring for his burns and for the bumps he had received while being dragged beyond the zone of the fire.

When evening came, he again dismissed the young man, but the latter came and listened to the two old people as before.

‘ What can we do to get rid of this pest ? ’ said the husband. ‘ He is full of cunning, but I do not want him for my daughter. You must find a way.’

‘ Listen then,’ answered his wife ; ‘ you must bid him be your dog, and you must take him with you to seek for turtles. If he does not find any, or if he cannot follow you on all fours, you can show him the door.’

‘ That is well thought of, woman,’ said the old man. ‘ To-morrow I will follow your advice.’

At cockcrow the youth took certain turtles and tied them here and there among the grasses

*How not to treat a Son-in-law*  
of the plain which he had heard his father-in-law  
propose to hunt.

At dawn he made his way to the house, and the  
old man said to him :

‘ My son, we are going to look for turtles and,  
as we have no dog, you must take its place.  
We will find one or two, and then return to eat  
them here.’

With that the father-in-law took a pouch of  
rice and a bamboo full of water, and set forth,  
with the young man running behind him on  
all fours. When they came to the plain where  
he had tied the turtles, the latter galloped on  
ahead and, entering the grasses, untied one of  
the animals and began to bark. The old man  
hurried up and saw his future son-in-law with a  
turtle between his teeth. Then the dog quested  
to left and right, and soon brought back seven  
or eight other turtles.

At noon the father became hungry, so he opened  
his pouch and began to eat ; but the youth,  
still playing the dog, charged a herd of buffaloes  
that happened to be passing and, by biting  
their legs, drove them into a field of ripe rice.  
The other rose and hastened to drive the buffaloes  
from the crop, but meanwhile the dog crept  
back and ate all the old man’s provisions, so  
that when he returned he found nothing at all.  
In his rage he would have beaten the dog, but

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

was too weary to catch him. He dragged himself over the long road home with a gnawing stomach ; yet he could not blame his future son-in-law, because he had bidden the latter behave like a dog. As soon as he reached home, he ate and sent the young man about his business for the day.

That night the clever young man, from his usual station, heard the husband tell the whole story to his wife, and the woman answer :

‘ When he was a dog, he made a fool of you. To-morrow you had better be the dog and he the master ; then you can do as much to him.’

Next morning the youth was told what part he had to play ; so he took water and rice, and went forth, with the old man trotting behind him on all fours. But he walked so quickly that the latter could not keep up with him, and presently he cried :

‘ Where is that terrible dog ? He is always lagging behind. How will he find any turtles?’

He beat the dog to make it go in front, but the old man could not run in the grasses and found it all he could do to follow his would-be son-in-law along the path, without worrying about any turtles. So the youth drubbed him until he was half dead, but the dog was ashamed and dared say nothing.

At noon the young man paused to eat, and, as

## *How not to treat a Son-in-law*

he ate, he said : ‘ What is the good of a dog that cannot find turtles ? This one can only eat and sleep.’

He swallowed all the rice and meat which he had brought with him, and only threw dry bones to the old man, who could not even gnaw them, because he had no teeth. When the meal was finished, the youth gave the old man a slash with a rattan, crying : ‘ We will go back to the house ! There is nothing to be done with such a dog ! ’

With that he set out, but the old man could go no further on all fours ; he stood upright and walked behind in great shame.

When they reached the house, the young man said to the woman : ‘ Mother, this dog is no good at all and we have found no turtles.’

And he took leave and returned to his own place.

As soon as the husband and wife had retired for the night, they started talking of the day’s happenings, and the old man told how he had been ill-treated and deprived of food.

‘ We cannot give him to our daughter,’ said the mother, ‘ and yet we do not seem to be able to get rid of him.’

‘ He is very ugly,’ agreed the old man, ‘ and would not suit our pretty girl at all. It is absolutely needful for you to think out

## *Tales of Cambodia*

something he cannot do, some enterprise that will make him lose patience and give us an excuse for sending him about his business.'

'I have it,' cried the woman. ' You must eat and chew your betel before dawn to-morrow, and then hide in this basket. I will put salt in another and, when this wretch returns, tell him that you have gone to buy things at the market, and that he must meet you there with the two baskets before noon. The market is much too far for him to reach in time ; he will become weary on the way and, thinking himself alone, most certainly give way to cursing.'

' You are right, and that is an excellent plan,' conceded the father, and the two of them went to sleep ; but the young man, as usual, had overheard their plan.

When he came in the morning, the old woman put the two baskets in his charge, and told him what he must do with them. He set forth immediately, and did not halt until he had covered half the distance to the market ; then he laid down his burden, saying aloud : ' The cover of this basket is badly fastened ! '

He took a cord and tied his father-in-law down most solidly ; then he went forward until he came to a river spanned by a wooden bridge. He set down the baskets right on the edge of

## *How not to treat a Son-in-law*

the bridge, and well to the middle of the stream ; a touch would be enough to overturn them into the water. Then he cried aloud :

‘ Unhappy that I am ! It is late, and my dear father-in-law will be very angry ; but my load is heavy and I am sure that I cannot arrive in time. I must rest for a moment under those trees ; after that I will try again.’

So saying, he walked away and searched until he found a great block of wood. Then he returned towards the bridge, imitating the sound of the heavy walk of an elephant with the block and shouting in a disguised voice :

‘ Who has left these baskets in the middle of the bridge ? My elephant will crush them. Come and take them away ! ’

He went forward, beating his heavy rhythm on the floor of the bridge, so that the old man in the basket really believed that an elephant was upon him and that he would be crushed to death. Suddenly, as he shivered in his prison, he felt a shock, and the two baskets fell into the water, as if they had been kicked there by the foot of the passing beast. The unhappy old man was well-nigh suffocated, and began to shake his basket in an agony ; but the youth let him drink for a little, for he had previously fastened the baskets to the bridge, so that they could not altogether sink. Soon,

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

however, he pretended to return from a long way off, crying :

‘ Who has dared to send an elephant along the bridge and hurl my baskets into the water ? Alas, what will my father-in-law say ? I am already late, and now all the salt is wetted.’

Then he drew his load out of the water and, seeing one of the baskets shaken by the trembling of the old man, called out again :

‘ Ah, woe, the fish have got in already ! All is spoiled ! I must open the baskets and let them dry. But the salt will melt. I must carry everything back to my mother-in-law, so that she may make fish pickle for the dear old man.’

So saying, he opened one of the baskets and discovered his father-in-law.

‘ Dearest father,’ he exclaimed, ‘ why did you not cry out ? Why did you not let me know that you were inside ? You ran a great risk of being drowned. Someone drove an elephant over the bridge, and it pushed you into the water with its foot.’

The old man listened without saying a word, and then returned home in raging silence. He felt himself flouted and at the end of his invention. He did not dare to set any further traps, and therefore consented to the marriage.

But by this time, though the young man still ardently desired the girl, he was by no means

## *How not to treat a Son-in-law*

certain that he wished to marry into that family ; therefore he decided to possess her, if possible, by a trick.

So next morning, before the wedding could take place, he came again to the house of his love and, feigning a great anxiety, said to her father : ‘ Last night as I returned through the forest to my own place, filled with joyful anticipations of my marriage, I heard the spirits talking together in the shrine which has been built for them where the way becomes two. They were plotting to carry off your daughter after dark to-day, because the chief of them has fallen very much in love with her. Also they said that they would keep guard round this house till then, so that she might not escape. Alas, alas, I suppose that they are ringing us invisibly even now ! ’

At this both the old man and his wife and the girl were thrown into consternation, and each suggested plans more foolish than the other for extricating themselves from their predicament ; but at last the youth said :

‘ I have found a way : it was put into my mind by your cleverness with the rice and the salt. Let your daughter get immediately into a sack, as if she were rice ; then, when her mother has fastened her in with a stick at the corners, we will bear her down the ladder of

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

the house and carry her to a place of safety in the mountain.'

The old woman at once did as had been suggested, and the youth set off with the sack on his back, accompanied by the old man, the two of them talking loudly concerning the destination of the rice in order to hoodwink the spirits. After they had proceeded for more than a mile and their path was beginning to ascend, the lecherous young man pretended great fatigue, and the father-in-law, who was still in great anxiety for his daughter's safety, himself took the sack upon his shoulders and began to climb with it slowly, while the bridegroom fell to the rear.

But, as soon as he saw that the old man was well started, the youth drew his knife and cut into the sack at that part where he judged his desire could best be satisfied. Then, firmly clasping the other's burden, he set himself to work. Soon the girl cried from inside the sack: 'Faster, oh, faster!' and at this the father broke into a run, so that very soon he was compelled to set his load down upon the path. But when he did so, he saw nothing except the beauties of his daughter protruding from the sack. The bridegroom had disappeared for ever.

We have told this story that it may serve as a

*How not to treat a Son-in-law*

lesson to those who have daughters to marry. If they wish to give their girl a husband, let them do so ; if they do not wish to, let them say so frankly. Above all, let them by no means imitate the tricks of this old man in choosing a son-in-law. Firstly, it is not honest ; secondly, no one can have the last word with a lover ; and thirdly, it is not safe.

•      •      •

---

---

## *Popusnokar and the Lingam*

ONE AFTERNOON POPUSNOKAR\* WAS PASSING by the garden of a rich house, and happened to look through a hole in the hedge of it. The place was deserted, and there, lying on the ground, was a wooden lingam. It had been carved and painted from the stump of a living banana tree; but now the roots were decayed and it had fallen down. As he was never one to waste anything, Popusnokar slipped through the opening in the hedge and possessed himself of the lingam; then he set off on his walk again, and all that afternoon carried the lingam over his shoulder, though it was nearly as tall as himself and made him sweat.

Towards evening he came near the outskirts of a strange village, and saw five or six girls who had been pounding rice in a glade and were now about to return home. Delighted at this opportunity of displaying his lingam, Popusnokar clasped it upright in front of him in the circle of his two arms, so that it was terrible to see, and ran at the women through the trees, singing loudly :

*Eh, ah, eh, tender ones,  
I am the ghost of love.  
Behold  
I am as round as a tree;*

## *Popusnokar and the Lingam*

*look at my red dome  
like sunset;  
lie in my shadow,  
bathe in my beams.  
Eh, ab, eh,  
I am the ghost of love,  
my tender ones,  
the tremendous ghost.*

When the girls saw and heard him thus in the gathering mist of the evening, they scattered and shrieked and fled from the glade in separate directions ; but while Popusnokar was capering and crying out with laughter at the success of his joke, he saw that one of them had turned in her flight and was coming back slowly towards him. As she drew near with every appearance of boldness, she sang :

*Oh dear, oh dear,  
a girl can only die once.  
I will lie in your shadow  
and bathe in your beams.  
Ab ghost,  
tremendous ghost,  
for I have seen a dome  
like the red sun setting—  
oh dear, oh dear,  
a girl can only die once—  
and a great tree.*

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

Though she had not been the youngest of the girls and was a little loosely fashioned, she was comely enough and desirous. So, when she came within snatching distance, Popusnokar cast the wooden lingam into the distance and, taking her to him, loved her with his own for a long time.

Yet his pleasure was so little that, when at last she rose and ran away from him in the direction of the village, he pursued her with this bitter and diverting song :

*If you thought the lingam really mine  
you were right to come back to me,  
oh, you were right.*

*Now take it as a gift in payment,  
O ocean of pleasure,  
for surely you have a means  
of smuggling it into the house  
with no one seeing.*

•            •            •





---

---

*Sanselkey*

ONE DAY PRINCE KOTORASH, WHOSE FATHER was King of one of the most beautiful lands in the world, conducted his sister Montea, a woman so comely and virtuous that all men loved her, into a wood near the palace, where she more delighted to run and play with her companions even than in the admirable gardens of her father.

At evening he returned alone except for his following, and his heart was bowed down by rage and despair and shame. A powerful Yack\* King, passing through the wood, had grown lost in love for the young princess and carried her away to the distant regions where he ruled.

The rape of the child who had been his joy brought such grief to the old King that he died of it.

The unhappy brother remained a prey to desolate sadness ; he reproached himself for not having been on his guard, for having allowed himself to be distracted by the women who were attendant on his sister ; worst of all, he was assailed by a doubt lest the abduction had been the result of a plot by which he had been fooled, and he groaned when he thought of his powerlessness to avenge the insult.

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

In spite of all the brilliance of the funeral festivities, piously accorded to the memory of the old King who had died so tragically, and in spite of the marvels of the coronation which took place soon afterwards in the presence of all the neighbouring kings and amid the acclamation of all men, nothing could lessen his violent anguish ; he was always seeing his dear sister in the palace of a brutal and ferocious monster, and seeking how he might one day fetch her back and punish the author of that odious crime.

At last he determined that he would have to place all his hopes of this enterprise in his six sons, who had been born of as many mothers and were now growing up.

At that time an event took place in the royal harem which greatly troubled it. Two of the young women whom Kotorash loved gave birth to handsome sons : by the side of one there suddenly appeared a bow, a dagger, and a very large and living snail-shell ; the other turned little by little into a small lion, that Reasheasey of whom the stories tell us.

The startled King consulted both holy men and sages, but these had been won over by the other women, who supposed from these supernatural indications that the little Prince would drive their own children from the throne and

### *Sanselkey*

be helped by the lion. So they all gave it as their opinion that it was to the interest of the King and his people that the two mothers and their offspring should be driven from the land at once.

The humane Kotorash lost this natural quality in the face of his misfortune and, fearing a great evil, caused the two young women to be carried far from his frontiers and abandoned with their little ones.

The exiles had no other resources but the snail-shell, the dagger, and the bow of the little boy, whose name was Sanselkey. They took refuge in a ruined temple in the middle of a wood ; it had been the work of the Neakta. There they remained hidden, guarded by the lion and living upon roots and wild fruit, and were soon forgotten.

. . .

After long years King Kotorash, who always kept green the memory of his ravished sister, judged that his sons were now old enough to seek out and fight the Yack, and to free and bring back their aunt Montea. Therefore he resolved to set them on their journey.

The six young men were at once thrown into the greatest possible dismay ; they were lazy fellows, and had grown up with their mothers at the court with but one desire, to share as

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

soon as might be the vast riches which were piled up day by day in the palaces and store-houses of their frugal father.

Not one of them felt able to direct such an enterprise, but they dared not confess this frankly, lest they should be lost. While taking leave of the King, they even pretended to consider their dangerous expedition a very simple one.

When they came to the limits of their father's kingdom, there was no end to the discussions which took place between them ; at last, having proved to each other that their one asset was their futility, they recalled that their little brother in exile had received an extraordinary gift from heaven at his birth, and that this was surely an indication of the child's future merit. If they could find him, perhaps he would be useful to them. They made enquiries.

No one in all the land knew of the fate of the two mothers or dared to offer himself as a guide to find them in the dark, beast-haunted forest, the resort of Yacks and Naga kings. So the six Princes waited for some time in the hope of hearing news and then, in their discouragement, decided to return home.

. . .

The King of the Nagas had asked a neighbour-

### *Sanselkey*

ing King of the Yacks for the hand of his daughter and only child in marriage ; and, now that the matter had been arranged, her father was taking the young girl to the home of her future master, that she might visit his tremendous kingdom. Suddenly a storm troubled the retinue, and the elephant bearing the Princess Sompor took fright and dashed away into the forest. There he threw her to earth before the lair of an enormous tiger, which leapt forward upon its prey.

Now at that very moment a young hunter, with ready bow, was looking upon the beast, which he had known for a long time. It was his custom when he saw it leaping upon some smaller animal to constrain himself, saying : 'It is his food, Pra En has willed that it should be so.' But, hearing the anguished cry of a human being and seeing her thus tumbled suddenly before him, he let fly his arrow and it passed through the two eyes of the tiger, which fell dead beside the Princess.

Leaping upon the beast, the brave hunter withdrew his arrow, saluted the terrified child by kneeling before her and then, seeing that her train was hurrying up to her, disappeared into the wood.

This accident put an end to the expedition ; the Yack had the skin of the tiger loaded upon

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

an elephant and then led his daughter back to her mother, Queen Montea.

Young Sompor said : ‘ Mother, a messenger from heaven saved my life. He was dressed in skins like a savage ; he saluted me and disappeared. He was more beautiful than you can imagine. I was so frightened and tongue-tied that I hardly thanked him. It is not possible that I should ever belong to the King of the Nagas.’ Then she burst into tears.

In the ruined temple in the woods, the two Princesses, guarded by the lion, were waiting the return of the dear child who was their only hope in misery. Sanselkey had strength and skill, very great courage and intelligence ; they had taught him so well that no prince could have been better educated, and hermits, deep in the forest through which he ran, had given him their own rare qualities. He was in all things so visibly protected by heaven that the two young women were never disquieted by his absences ; but they were always delighted to have him near them. His marvellous bow, which was ever ready without his stretching it, made shooting easy for him. His dagger was more useful still, for, because of it, none might approach its owner unperceived. And his handsome snail-shell, when such was necessary,

### *Sanselkey*

traced out his way before him ; it passed over the ground, leaving it marked with a shining ribbon ; and the rest of the time it would sit on the end of Sanselkey's bow to rest.

As he was hastening back to the retreat where his mother lived with her companion, the young hunter was still under the spell of the charming adventure which had befallen him. Passing by a stream, he saw himself in the mirror of it and, comparing the rough skin which covered him with the rich stuffs which that beautiful child had worn during the short moment he beheld her, he sat down sadly on the bank and then went in to bathe. The spirits of that place, without his being aware, replaced the skins, which he had cast down beside his weapons and the snail-shell, with the brightest and most delightful garments, and left a little stick for him to read, on which was written : ‘ You are the son of a King. Dress as befits you.’

The six Princes wandered in blind confusion and, since they had become the plaything of the spirits, the more they strove to leave the forest behind, the deeper they became involved in it.

One day they arrived at the retreat of the exiles, half dead with hunger, thirst and weariness, and still shivering at all the cries of the wild

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

beasts they had heard about them in the forest. Thanks to the cordial welcome they received, they were soon comforted and felt safe. They told their rank and were astonished to learn that the poor women were also Princesses, and that they had actually reached the goal of their first endeavour. Well knowing that they could do nothing by themselves, not even return to their father's house, and fearing that the mother might refuse her son to them, they lied to the women, saying :

‘ It is the King’s order that we take Sanselkey for our companion. Together we shall be able to liberate our dear aunt, Neang Montea.’

The Princesses were so used to the rare qualities which Sanselkey displayed in spite of his extreme youth, that this demand neither astonished nor grieved them overmuch. Their unhappiness at being separated from the sole prop of their existence would be balanced by the certainty of seeing him properly appreciated by the King. So they accepted the journey for him, if he should himself consent.

When Sanselkey returned all shining with gold, his six elder brothers were heavily sleeping ; but the women were stupefied at the complete transformation in his dress and questioned him joyfully about it. As soon as he had told them all, they informed him of what had taken place,

### *Sanselkey*

and of their hope that the favour of King Kotorash would return to them all, if their darling should succeed in freeing his aunt Montea.

Sanselkey was delighted to have the opportunity of carrying out such an enterprise. Next morning he took up his weapons and his snail-shell, and then invited his brothers to set forth with him. At the wish of the poor Princesses, who were divided between hope and anxiety, the little lion Reasheasey also accompanied the young men, in order to protect them.

Sanselkey had his difficult and perilous labours to distract him ; but with the Princes it was quite otherwise. The least thing out of the ordinary that they did was a great weariness to them, and the smallest obstacle discouraged them. Certain giant snakes barred their passage on the top of a mountain, and they would have fled ; but their brother drove off the monsters and reassured them. The noise of his arrows singing through the air was such that it terrified every adversary, and the Princes looked upon him with astonishment and fear. They asked themselves what good it did for them to accompany him. And he, for his part, soon understood that they would hinder rather than help him, and looked forward to some occasion which would allow him to suggest, without

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

wounding them, that they should wait for him in a convenient place.

This opportunity presented itself some days later, when a vast river barred their advance. The six brothers refused as one man to cross it without a boat. So Sanselkey offered to go himself to free their aunt, and installed them on the river bank with the little lion to guard them. When they had come to this arrangement, he embarked upon the living snail-shell and successfully crossed the waves.

In the land beyond the river the Yack Kilian had a great house, and, since the snail-shell traced out his path so as to pass it, Sanselkey entered without hesitation. He woke the monster and provoked him to such a fury that he pursued him and would have killed him; but a spirit suddenly appeared before the eyes of the young man, driving a chariot. He seated Sanselkey inside it and, leaping upon the backs of the two horses, urged them without pause to the very threshold of the palace of the Yack King Kompon. He announced the absence of the latter, and then disappeared in a light cloud.

• . .  
Neang Montea was indeed astonished to see an elegant Prince thus brave the snares which had been sown about her pavilion, and she was

### *Sanselkey*

even more so when she learned his name. Her happiness at listening to her delightful nephew as he spoke of the land which she had left was great enough, but she regretted that her husband King Kompon was not there to welcome him. He was again conducting his daughter to her marriage with the King of the Nagas.

As she spoke with him, she looked at him carefully, and was forced to say to herself in vexation : ‘ Alas, why did this honest and distinguished nephew of mine not visit my country sooner ? He would most certainly have pleased my dear Sompor, and now she has gone in a sad consternation to the Naga king.’

Sanselkey still believed that his aunt saw in him a liberator before all else : at length, pained and surprised that she did not seem to understand what had brought him, he said :

‘ O deeply respected aunt, make no mistake. I have not come here on a visit. The King your brother, my father Kotorash, has sent me to rescue you from the monster Kompon and to kill him ! ’

Seeing her nephew so charming in everything and yet hearing him say such terrible words, Neang Montea answered with a laugh : ‘ Dear child of my brother, you must be careful of your language here. In a very short time my king will return, and I should be very much

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

grieved if you, who have so pleased me, should anger him.'

The eyes of the young man became injected with blood and shot forth lightnings ; his aunt suddenly realised their misunderstanding, and saw disaster wheeling down upon her life. To avert it, she said again : ' If my brother loves me, he ought to forget what happened so long ago. I am very happy, and not for anything in the world would I leave the tranquil pleasures I enjoy with Kompon.'

Sanselkey, as he stepped from the room, cried out : ' You shall follow me back ! If necessary, I will kill all your servants to make you do so. Behold my power ! ' Taking his bow, he let fly a steel-tipped arrow, whose long and shrieking passage was so terrible that all the palace trembled to its foundations. It struck a giant tree, which was set on fire and fell apart in ruins.

Returning to his aunt, he found her upon her knees. ' Have you decided to flee with me ? ' he asked.

' Oh, my dear nephew,' she answered, ' I see in you all the power of Pra En. Ah, be as pitiful ! I would rather die than leave this place before hearing news of my daughter Sompore; for she is unhappy. I will soon have these tidings, since Kompon is even now

### *Sanselkey*

approaching ; I will hide you when he comes, and while he is asleep we will speak again.'

At this moment the loud trumpeting of twenty elephants announced the return of the Yack King, and Sanselkey, seeing the grief and terror of his aunt, said grudgingly : 'Very well, hide me.'

. . . .

After the accident which had cast her dearly loved daughter at the feet of the tiger, Neang Montea had done all in her power to persuade her husband not to marry the child to the King of the Nagas. But he would always answer : 'It is necessary that this King become one of us. At present there is nothing but wars along our frontier : to proceed with this alliance will prevent them, to abandon it now will increase their gravity. We cannot delay.'

This second separation was more cruel still, and Sompore had departed in tears, taking the tiger skin as a bed beneath her mat.

When she arrived, the King of the Nagas expressed his joy in these words : 'I wish to please you, what can I do ?' 'O King,' she answered, 'if you are as good as men say, take pity on the great grief which I feel at being separated from my mother. Postpone our marriage for a little while and, until the day comes, let me live apart with my companions.'

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

So the King gave her a beautiful pavilion in his vast gardens.

When she had hidden Sanselkey, Neang Montea ran with a heavy heart to the King, her husband. But she became happier on hearing him speak of Sompot, and talked with him until heavy sleep came over him. Then, calling her young nephew to her, she besought him, saying : ‘ Will you be kind and go away now ? The King is sleeping.’

But he answered : ‘ Nay, if you will not follow me, the direst misfortune awaits you.’

She could not believe that this was a real threat, and was still determined not to leave her husband, the Yack. She sat on the foot of her couch in tears, and said : ‘ Think of my daughter ! Unless I stay here, I shall never see her again.’

Sanselkey understood that he would accomplish nothing except through fear, therefore he said : ‘ Come with me, and to-morrow I will fetch your child to you from wherever she may be. If you refuse, you shall die. When my father sees me bringing him two heads, he will understand that I have fulfilled my mission ! ’ He seized her and dragged her along with so terrible a gesture of his lifted dagger that she gave in to him and walked quietly by his side.

### *Sanselkey*

At the next nightfall a deep and narrow cleft in the rock of the mountains offered a shelter in which his aunt might wait for Sompot in safety, so Sanselkey closed the entrance with great blocks of stone and left her.

He reckoned that the Yack Kompon would have started in pursuit as soon as he woke ; therefore he went out to meet him, in order to have done with the matter.

When he saw the King and all his people, he knelt in salutation and then, rising, cried out : ' O evil ravisher, I am Sanselkey, the youngest of the sons of King Kotorash. I would have you know in dying that Neang Montea remained faithful to you, and that it was only by force that I was able to carry her away from the places where she had lived with you.'

He shot his arrow, and the monster, as though stricken by a thunderbolt, fell forwards and died. And at the terrible sound of the shot, all the men that were with him collapsed with their foreheads in the dust. Respectfully lifting the body, Sanselkey bade some gather an enormous pile of precious woods, and others make preparation for such funeral rites as befitted a king. A gold shrine was brought, and in this the dead was set upon the pyre. Sanselkey bowed himself and then set the wood

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

on fire with an arrow from his bow, so that all was reduced to ashes.

In the pavilion of the Naga King, the young Princess was dreaming of the mother she had so unwillingly left, to marry a husband she did not love. ‘Since he is so kind-hearted,’ she asked herself, ‘could he not send me back to my palace, seeing me so sad?’ But then, on consideration, she realised that this was the one kindness she could not expect from him. Nothing remained for her, then, but to die of grief. Yet the idea terrified her, for she still retained that fear of death which had stricken her as she lay before the tiger. The memory of this adventure, which she easily lived over again without having need to look at the enormous skin stretched beneath her mat, caused her to think also: ‘I was saved from a savage beast. Would it not be possible for me to be saved from this King, for I fear him quite as much?’

Then her thought came to the hunter, and she said: ‘How very lucky it was that he should be there at the critical moment. Could not Pra En in his sweet pity send him once more?’

In the innocent dream which her heart created for her, she would have preferred the messenger

### *Sanselkey*

of heaven to be a simple human like herself, and not an angel. In her childish imagination she wanted him to be transformed into a prince, such as her mother had described to her when evoking memories of her own country. She smiled at the hope which was born within her ; she made him appear in her thought before her in cloth of gold, and salute her as before. And to keep that pleasant image, which came at the end of all her dreams, she shut her eyes.

An unexpected noise made her open them, and she saw the King of the Nagas standing before her in great emotion. He said : ‘ Sanselkey, the nephew of Neang Montea, has arrived here, and these are his words : “ By order of King Kotorash, my father, I have rescued his dear sister, Neang Montea, from the Yack King Kompon. She is on the way to her native land, and begs you to send her daughter Neang Sompore back to her of your great goodness. Would you prefer to please this poor mother or to fight with me ? On my way hither I have killed Kompon, who came in pursuit of us. You shall die the same death if you refuse.” ’

‘ O betrothed whom I love dearly, I have come to you before answering him. If I have to lose you, the blackest grief of my life will soon destroy me. Will you give me leave to fight ? ’

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

The young Princess could find no words. She had never contemplated so great a modification of that charming dream which was hers by day and night, and night and day.

At last she said : ‘O King of the Nagas, although you are a very good man, you know that I love my mother more. But I would not that any misfortune should happen on my account. I trust heaven with the guidance of my destiny ; therefore do you and this Prince both wait in peace until heaven declares itself.’

As she was still speaking, a chariot halted beneath their startled eyes, and the same spirit who had already aided Sanselkey took the tiger skin, spread it in the chariot, and signed to Sompor to be seated upon it. Then, leaping lightly upon one of the horses, he started them again, and a moment afterwards Sanselkey was astride the other. But Sompor had her back turned to the horses and was bowing in confusion as she said farewell to the Naga King. The latter, in his grief, called to the serpent folk to help him to pursue the chariot.

Then Sanselkey begged the spirit to sow trouble among the Nagas without harming them, and the spirit caused a Kruth to terrify and calm them.

. . . .

As she was thus carried to her mother, the

### *Sanselkey*

Princess was full of grief, for her back was still turned on her ravishers and she could not see them. Now that she was no longer in the land of the Naga King, she disliked the thought of being borne away so far from the dear scenes of her childhood, and felt a grudge against the unknown Prince for having thus interfered with the very existence of her mother and herself. And her greatest sorrow of all was to have been rescued, as she thought, by another saviour than the one of whom she had dreamed. Sanselkey, for his part, kept firmly before his eye the desire of the King, his father ; but his soul still wandered in the wood and lived over again that moment of emotion he had felt there.

When they came to the rocky retreat of Montea, he cleared the entrance of it with mighty efforts of his arms, and the two women came together weeping for joy.

Then, kneeling at the feet of the Queen, his aunt, and with his two joined hands lifted piously to his bowed forehead, he announced the death of Kompon, and begged her pardon for offences which, as he said, only the need of persuading her to come to his father had caused him to commit.

While he was speaking, Sompot looked upon him in delighted astonishment and recognised

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

beneath the bright garments of the Prince the savage who had saved her.

Before the Queen could say a word, she cried : ‘O mother, thank this young man who is begging your pardon, for I owe him my life. I am quite confused that I should never have looked at him as we came hither. He is the brave and skilful hunter who laid the wild tiger at my feet.’

Sanselkey, who was as surprised as she, was also delighted to hear his aunt tearfully thank him, and even more so to find that the girl whose memory had never left him was his own cousin, and that she remembered him.

While they were talking in great content, the little lion Reasheasey, who had been left by the river with the six brothers, appeared before them, having come forward to hasten them. They therefore continued their journey, with Reasheasey running ahead, until the chariot set them down on the near side of the river and disappeared with its supernatural driver.

Then all three sat down on the tiger skin, and Sanselkey related the sad misfortunes of his own poor mother and her companion. The two women wept to hear them, and at last understood why the young man had been so set on carrying out the rescue.

Sanselkey looked at the wild river and realised

### *Sanselkey*

that the three of them could not safely pass over, among the fish and crocodiles, on the back of the living snail-shell ; but just as he was giving way to despair a certain Yack made his appearance. This was Vanreash, the brother of Kompon, who had recognised Queen Montea. When he learnt that she was on her way to visit her old parents, he took them all three in his left hand and, swimming with his right, carried them across the water. Then he took leave of them and departed, understanding nothing of these affairs.

The elder Princes began to be considerably troubled, first by the long absence of their younger brother, and then by the sudden departure of the little lion, a circumstance which led them to believe that Sanselkey was dead. They mourned together and asked each other what would become of them without his help, seeing that they did not even know in what direction their native country lay.

So, when he appeared before them with the Princesses, their joy was as sincere as it was noisy, and they showered tokens of delight and admiration upon all three. But when Sanselkey told them, at their request, all the details of his long, adventurous and successful

## *Tales of Cambodia*

journey, they became colder and fell into an uneasy silence.

Dumb and unconscious jealousy was born in their hearts, and they said among themselves : ‘With such a brother none of us will ever reign, for he has courage and audacity and intelligence by nature, and to these are added definitely supernatural gifts. Therefore the King will love him, and the nobles and the people soon take him to their hearts.’

With one accord they decided to kill him, and take to themselves the glory of having delivered Neang Montea and Neang Sompore. And having reached this decision they had no other thought than to provoke a convenient occasion.

After long days, when their band was journeying in the direction of their native land and had nearly reached it, it camped one night at the foot of a high mountain crowned with sharp-pointed rocks. The six elder brothers proposed to climb to the top and celebrate the happy return of the King’s sister with songs and dances, while she and her daughter rested in the camp, under guard of the lion and the snail.

Sanselkey accepted their plan without suspicion ; but when in their climb among the cliffs he was above the deepest chasm of all, his brothers pushed him down head over heels,

### *Sanselkey*

and he fell into the void without a single cry against his murderers.

The six wicked Princes returned in haste and announced that Sanselkey had fallen into a gulf. They also informed the women that they alone had conceived the idea of getting their brother to help them in the rescue, and that their father, who had exiled him so long ago, did not even know that he existed. They bade the two, therefore, not mention his name, and threatened to visit any indiscretion with terrible punishments.

After this they proceeded towards the capital by the great road, which was already thick with numerous villages, while the lion and the snail returned in tears to the abode of the two poor mothers.

Seeing them enter alone, these last understood the misfortune which had overcome them and, under their guidance, set forth to do honour to any remains which they could find of their dear child.

Little by little, Neang Montea and her daughter understood from what they overheard of the conversation of the Princes that these were indeed the authors of their brother's death ; but, as they were both terrified, they hid their

grief and only shed tears when there was none to see them.

The delightful welcome which the King gave them was cruel torture, especially when they heard him warmly thanking his sons for what they had done. Their great desire was to tell the whole truth, but the wicked mothers of the six young men, who had soon been informed of the crime, would not leave them for a moment, pretending a wish to please them in all things, and actually spying upon them. When these six women saw that King Kotorash stayed at the height of happiness because he had found his dear sister again, they plotted to make the most of the situation by marrying Princess Sompot to whichever one of their six sons should happen to please her. And, in order that the King himself might be favourable, they begged him to act as their spokesman to Montea. She and her daughter showed nothing of the great shame which such an affront had put upon them, and, when they had talked together, the mother answered : ' My daughter Sompot will gladly marry that one of the Princes who can tell her the story of the death of the savage tiger whose skin is now her bed.'

This strange question was a great embarrassment to the six. Although some excellent answers were framed for them by their friends,

### *Sanselkey*

these all missed the mark, and they were forced to decline the test.

As their constant efforts to make themselves loved continued fruitless, their mothers feared that one day the King might learn the blackness of his sons' hearts. Therefore they determined to turn him against Montea and her daughter, and said : 'Do you not see how sad they are ? We know that they weep when they are alone. Doubtless they regret the King of the Nagas and the King of the Yacks.'

Kotorash himself had seen the sad airs of the two Princesses on several occasions ; so he gave orders that they should be watched. When he was certain that they always wept together in secret, he grew furious and, without giving them a hearing, had them carried far from the palace, just as he had done with the other victims of the same six women, those two unhappy mothers.

. . .

When the brothers had made certain of their safety by such means, they dared further and begged the King to divide the kingdom among them. Kotorash, who was as wounded as he was surprised, told them that they were young and inexperienced, that the people would be discontented, and that they would have to wait long years for the throne.

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

Then, to distract himself in the grief which this request had caused him, he went off hunting. Riding deep into the woods on his good horse, more concerned with his thoughts than with his quarry, he became careless and lost his following.

He brooded over the cruel exile to which he had condemned his sister and Sompore, and also those two other women in times past, at the instigation of the mothers of those who now wished for his throne. He asked himself whether he were not the victim of a plot on the part of those about him, he regretted his sudden decision, and decided to abandon the hunt in order to seek for his sister and bring her back with honour to the capital.

He wandered for a long time on either hand, searching for his followers ; suddenly he came upon a clearing and saw the poor Princesses seated sadly upon the tiger skin and cooking their food.

He ran weeping towards them and expressed great remorse for his ill-considered hardness. When he had begged their pardon, he asked them to tell him fearlessly the cause of their great grief.

Thus he learnt of the crime of his sons, and wept bitterly at the death of the good Sanselkey, who might have been so great an aid to

## *Sanselkey*

him had he lived. He asked himself how he would ever be able to find the old temple where Sanselkey's unhappy mother dwelt with her companion, and determined not to set foot in his palace again until he had succeeded in doing so.

Meanwhile his following, who had soon stumbled upon his tracks, rode up to rejoin him, and he at once sent a courier with orders that the six Princes and their mothers should be arrested.

Then he dispatched his men in all directions to ask after the humble retreat for which he sought, and himself, with Neang Montea and Sompore and a sufficient retinue, went forward into the thickest of the great forest.

One day they lay down to rest on the borders of a stream flowing near a hermitage, and the King sent his officers to ask the old and holy inhabitant concerning those whom he sought. 'If you go to the West you will find them,' the hermit answered.

. . .

The two poor mothers, led by the lion and the snail, had searched all the region of those rocks without finding the least trace of Sanselkey. Weeping and nigh to death, they turned back towards their dwelling, and were half-way there when the little lion suddenly left them. He

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

went like an arrow, but his head was turned to call them to follow him. Supposing that someone was waiting for them at their home, they went forward in haste, following the ribbon of watered silver left for their guidance by the snail.

Their despair was swiftly turned to great joy, for the lion came back with Sanselkey, who had been waiting for them at the retreat. They could not turn their delighted eyes away from him while he told them of the adventures of his great journey and of the attempt which had been made upon his life. ‘At the very moment when my ungrateful brothers cast me over the cliff,’ he concluded, ‘a certain god or spirit, disgusted to see so terrible a crime essayed in a locality confided to his care, caught me on the end of his arm upon a soft bed. Then he gave me back my marvellous bow and sent me to comfort you.’

Sanselkey thought : ‘My brothers will take care that my father never hears of me. My only hope is in my dear aunt and her delightful child ; yet what can they achieve against those six reprobates ? I must leave all to heaven.’

King Kotorash set forth again, following the direction which the anchorite had given him,

### *Sanselkey*

and soon found the retreat of which he was in search. Halting his men at some distance, he went forward with Montea and Sompore, who entered first and quickly called him.

You can imagine his astonishment when he saw the delightful Prince, whom he had thought dead, appear before him, holding the two exiled mothers by the hand, and fall upon his knees to greet him. Full of confusion and most bitter regret, he humbly asked their forgiveness for this long exile, and promised to recompense them for it as far as he was able. His sister had already told him of how Sanselkey had accomplished his mission, but he wished to hear his son repeat the full details of it and to describe the intervention of the spirit who had saved him.

He listened in great content, and the others shared this emotion with him.

Seeing his sister well-nigh choked by happiness and the eyes of her daughter sparkling with pleasure, an idea came to him, and he said : ' My six wicked sons, who shall be punished with their mothers, asked for the hand of Sompore, and my sister answered for her that she would willingly marry any of my sons who could tell her the story of the death of the savage tiger upon whose skin she slept. But none understood this question.

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

‘Now the touching confusion of Sompor and the burning, thankful glances which my dear Sanselkey casts upon her, have made clear the riddle. Let my pleasant son, my only heir, tell us the story, and then we will depart and order his marriage with my sister’s charming daughter to be prepared as soon as may be.’

The good news was swiftly made known on every side, and brought great satisfaction to the whole kingdom. All the people of the capital came forth a great way to greet the King and his companions, and to receive them royally.

Kotorash at once assembled his chief dignitaries and told them of the unworthy conduct of his older sons and of their mothers. All twelve were at once condemned to far exile. When the guards returned, after taking them away, they gave an account of their long journey in these words : ‘Not one of the culprits had any regret except for what he had lost. Instead of deplored their past wickedness and hoping for eventual pardon, they heaped curses upon the King and upon Sanselkey, and their one thought was of vengeance. While they were so cursing, we left them, and at that moment the earth opened and swallowed them up.’

### *Sanselkey*

In the following year Sompore gave birth to a son, so beautiful that he would have been adored and flattered from night to morning, if the Prince, his father, remembering his own childhood, had not declared that, in order to grow up to be a man, and later a King, he must be trained in the same hardihood as the bravest of his subjects.

Other sons came to them, and also daughters ; but we will say nothing of these except that they were all so educated that they could run the risks of life without feeling fear.

A long time afterwards, King Kotorash, having built a superb temple quite close to the ruined retreat of the two women, called his son Sanselkey to the throne and went there to end his life in pious meditation. Princess Sompore, the daughter of Montea and the Yack King, thus became Queen, and their dear eldest born, who was now a man, appeared ever by their side as their heir, with the great bow in his hand.

. . . .

Sanselkey built rustic altars to all the spirits that had helped him ; he owed his glory and his life itself to them, and therefore yearly sought those well-remembered places and did them honour.

Montea and Sompore joined with him in raising

*Love Tales of Cambodia*

a great mausoleum on the spot where Kompon had breathed his last. You may see it still. Soon afterwards the little lion and the living snail-shell died, and the same gold urn received their ashes.

. . . .

---

---

*Popusnokar and the Girl's Mother*

ONCE IT HAPPENED THAT POPUSNOKAR WAS lying by the side of a river when a girl went into it to bathe. As she climbed out and began making her toilet, she became aware of his presence ; but she continued rubbing saffron into her body, and let him gaze at her. Her breasts were like great lemons, and her legs and arms like gold creepers ; her sex and her mouth were orchids of purple.

As Popusnokar looked, he violently desired the girl and said : ‘ Set in my bosom, star.’ But she, who had all the time regarded him and not in the least desired him, cried : ‘ Stars do not set upon the river bank where all the people come.’ ‘ Then, if it be not too high,’ begged Popusnokar, ‘ tell me where I may find the mat that the star sets upon.’

Now the girl had already decided to make a fool of Popusnokar for his boldness ; so she said : ‘ The mat is the left-hand mat, and the house has the wild bee talisman.’ Then, leaving him to count the hours till night by the gong strokes of his heart, she returned to her mother’s house.

The older woman asked after her bathing, and the young one told the tale of Popusnokar’s impudence. ‘ And now,’ she said, ‘ either let

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

us share your mat for once, seeing that it is on the right, and place something sharp and terrible on mine ; or, if you will, let us change mats to-night.'

'Simply that nothing may be wasted and to preserve your virtue, I will change mats,' answered the mother, and immediately stripped herself naked and began to scent herself and brighten the immensities of her body with turmeric. It was plain to be seen that two giant pomeloes, over-ripened, had been given her, and portions of an elephant's belly ; she had the softness of an ant-eater and was as cold as the fire.

At dead of night Popusnokar climbed like a scorpion up the ladder, and sought the left-hand mat ; but no sooner had he leaned over it with whispered endearments than he was collected, so to say, in the arms of a whirlwind, and shattered like an orange, and drained like a cup. He felt the gifts of the elephant and the ant-eater and the pomelo, and fought with all his might to escape.

By the time he succeeded he was very angry ; so he leapt about the hut and threw all the cooking pots and jars, and anything else he could feel on his way, in the direction of the laughter he heard in one corner and the sighing which came from the other.

*Popusnokar and the Girl's Mother*  
At the same time he shouted this song, which  
cast both the women into equal confusion :

*If the toothless crocodile  
could so maltreat me,  
how well have I escaped  
a one with teeth !  
If hamadryad be so deadly,  
so deadly,  
how well have I escaped  
a poison that even hamadryad  
had spewed out of her body  
and long rejected !  
Ah, ah !*

Then he sprang down the ladder into the night.

---

---

## *Kung the Courageous*

**T**HREE LIVED A MAN IN THE OLD DAYS WHO had two wives. His name was Kung, and the two women were called Am and Kom.

One day Kung took Am and Kom on a journey, to visit relations in a far-off province, but the region through which they started was ravished at that time by a ferocious tiger which ceaselessly pursued both man and beast. Kung reached a great forest, and the tiger was there ; as soon as it saw the man approaching, it bounded towards him with terrible roarings. Trembling in all his limbs, Kung ran and hid himself in a hollow tree, where he stayed half fainting for fright, while Am and Kom combined their strength and killed the animal with a cudgel. Seeing that it was dead, Kung came forth from his hiding-place, snatched up a stick and beat the corpse of the tiger as hard as he could. His wives grew indignant and cried :

‘ You are not a man at all, but a little woman. Also it is cowardly to beat a tiger when he is dead.’

Kung fell furiously upon them and insulted them, saying :

‘ No one ever heard of women killing a tiger. Only men have such audacity.’

## *Kung the Courageous*

Kung cut a liana, fastened it round the beast and then, with the help of the two women, dragged it to the village. All the people of that country came together, rejoicing at the sight, and asked : ‘ How did you succeed in killing the beast ? He was terrible, we cannot count the number of men and buffaloes and cattle he devoured. You have done us a great service in ridding us of him.’

‘ Kung,’ said the two women, ‘ saw the tiger and hid in a hollow tree. We two destroyed the terrible creature by ourselves.’

At these words, Kung heaped violent curses upon his wives. ‘ Never has any woman,’ he cried, ‘ had the strength or boldness to kill a tiger. O people of this village, you know that well ! ’

Then, bursting with pride, he told how he had gone about it : ‘ The tiger was here, and I was just there. I seized a bludgeon in this way, and smote it thus, and the tiger fell over there.’

Kung imitated every stroke of that combat as he spoke, leaping to left and right, brandishing his stick, and exhausting himself to gain the admiration of the villagers.

All who heard him were filled with deep respect for Kung and agreed with one accord that he should henceforth be called Kung the Courageous. The renown of this brave man came to the

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

ears of the King himself, who raised him to high dignity.

Now it soon happened that a redoubtable crocodile took up its abode in the river which bathed the capital, and snapped up some subject of his Majesty every day. No one dared come near the water, business was interrupted, the boats swung empty at their moorings, and desolation lay on the whole country.

When he was told of this, the King gave orders that Kung the Courageous should go and capture the crocodile. Kung became sick with dread ; but how could he gainsay the royal command ? He answered : ‘ Let your Majesty have no fear. I will see to the matter.’ Then he returned home, and said to his wives : ‘ O you who are dear to me, I must say good-bye. The King has bidden me catch a terribly wicked crocodile that is haunting the tide of the river. This time I am lost for good. The evil beast will devour me. When I fought with the tiger, it was on solid ground and I had all my advantages. But now, what strength shall I have in the water ? I will not even be able to see. Yet it is the King who bids me go, and I must obey. There is nothing for me to do but to leap into the river and let myself be eaten.’

Kung called together his children, his depend-

## *Kung the Courageous*

ents and all his relations, and bade them farewell. He was ghastly pale with fear, his teeth chattered, and when he set forth he could scarcely walk because his legs were trembling so. A cold sweat flowed down between his shoulders and he stumbled with fright.

When he came to the river bank, he saw first the crocodile floating quite near in and fast asleep, and next all the people of that country massed in a great crowd to see Kung the Courageous destroy their enemy.

Noticing two trees which had sprung from the same root at the water's edge in such a way that they formed a fork, he sat down in this for a moment, seeking to pluck up his spirits. The sleeping crocodile floated on the surface of the water at two yards' distance from him. As he took in the proportions of the beast, Kung's throat retracted, he lost his breath, and his hair stood on end upon his head. He rose with a brisk movement, he was at the end of all things, he wished to be done with the matter at any cost. Shutting his eyes, he threw himself into the river.

The crocodile, thus suddenly woken, made a prodigious effort to leap on shore, and fate willed that it should tumble into the fork of the two trees, and be thus taken as in a vice, unable to go either back or forward.

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

Kung the Courageous, rising to the surface, opened his eyes, counting the few seconds of life which remained to him, and saw the crocodile thus snared. He cried to his children to take a lance and transpierce it. Only when it was most certainly dead did Kung himself dare to approach the animal.

‘Marvel at my strength,’ he cried, ‘and at my courage ! I swam under water until I came right up to this terrible beast, and I threw him on shore so dexterously that he became my prisoner.’

All who saw these things were convinced that he was telling the truth and praised him extravagantly. He was carried in triumph to the city, and there told the tale of his high deed to the King, who rewarded his eminent service with new office and dignity.

The reputation of Kung the Courageous was from that time established past peradventure.

Some time after this, a war broke out. An ambitious neighbour invaded the King’s territory, and the latter confided the command of all his armies to the fire-eating Kung.

Kung the Courageous was quite paralysed this time. He returned home and dragged himself to his mat ; he could take no food and speak no word ; his eyes were turned back with terror.

## *Kung the Courageous*

His two wives came to him and said : ‘ Friend, why do you lie down thus without eating ? What has happened to put you in this lamentable state ? ’

Kung had to call upon all his forces before he could answer : ‘ The King has commanded your elder brother to lead his armies to the war. Your brother trembles with rude fear. He does not know how to escape his sovereign’s order, and yet he does not wish to go to fight.’

‘ Do not be so terrified,’ said the women, ‘ for we will accompany you and help you. Rise up now and eat and take your bath as usual, and calm your dear heart.’

Thus fortified by his wives, Kung rose and bathed and ate. Then he made his preparation against the armies of the enemy.

When the time came, he took leave of the King and left for the war, accompanied by his two wives. He was astride on the head of an elephant, and Am and Kom both sat behind him. His army surrounded him on every side, and his forces went forward in good order, with music at their head and banners streaming.

As soon as the foe was sighted and an engagement became inevitable, Kung grew blind with terror and, in his panic, thrust his spear into the elephant’s head. The animal rushed forward like a whirlwind, hurled itself through the

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

ranks, passed the whole army so swiftly that none of the soldiers could keep pace with it, and dashed far into the enemy's ranks.

Kung's assailants, seeing him thus fall upon them and convinced that he must have some supernatural power so to expose himself, fled in a mad rout, throwing down their arms, leaving their baggage and their beasts behind, and having no thought but to save their lives.

Kung the Courageous recovered all his assurance at this astonishing victory. He called together his chief officers and boasted to them of his bravery. Some were sceptical, since they saw manifest traces of Kung's fear on the head of his elephant ; but Kung said :

‘ What does that prove ? Does one halt for so small a matter as a colic in the heat of fighting ? True courage consists in thinking of nothing but victory when the foe is near.’

All the army heard his words, and some, who were intelligent, knew what to think of Kung's bravery ; but by far the greater number had no sense and made him a long ovation.

Kung returned in triumph to the capital and, prostrating himself before the King, told how the foe had been dispersed at his approach.

The King rejoiced with all his heart, overwhelmed Kung with honours and high recom-

## *Kung the Courageous*

pense, made him the chief dignitary of his kingdom and gave him splendid presents.

Kung became prouder than ever of his strength and boldness.

This story was told to us by old men who had it from their grandfathers. If any curious person wishes to hear it, let him not mock us.

---

## *Popusnokar and the Pan-flutes*

IT IS SAID THAT POPUSNOKAR USED TO CUT HIS flutes\* fresh as he needed them, and then play on them, and after a while throw them away. Now it happened once in the spring-time of the year that he wished another flute, so that he might make his new song for the season.

He went down by the river bank and began to cut his flute; but a female royal swan was waiting there, and soon her lover appeared in the sky, returning from a long journey. He dropped down to her, and the two birds embraced and coupled together. When the flute was finished, Popusnokar played on it in several ways, but it always answered with the soft piping note of amorous swans, and seemed to say only :

*Wing, white wing, wing ;  
wing, wing, white wing . . .*

‘ This is pleasant enough, but it is not my song,’ said Popusnokar, after many attempts to express himself on the flute. So he thrust it in the cloth at his waist and sought the forest, where he hoped he might be undisturbed while he cut another instrument.

But a female royal elephant was walking there,

## *Popusnokar and the Pan-flutes*

and her lover, having escaped from the King's stable, ran through the trees to her, and the two animals embraced and coupled together.

When the second flute was finished, Popusnokar played upon it in various ways, but it always answered with the deep humming note of amorous elephants, and seemed to say only :

*Bosom, whom? Bosom,  
bosom, bosom, whom?*

‘This is not my song, though it is pleasant enough,’ said Popusnokar, after he had made many attempts on the second flute ; so he thrust it in the cloth at his waist and betook himself, with a fresh and unworked reed, to the grove of fig trees in front of the Pagoda of Buddha. ‘For there, if anywhere, I shall be undisturbed,’ said Popusnokar.

But as he fashioned his third flute, he saw a young woman as yellow and without speck as the noon sun on the river, and she was hiding behind the largest fig tree. Then a student came out from the Pagoda, as strong as teak wood, and enfolded her ; and the two embraced each other and coupled together. When the third flute was finished, Popusnokar played upon it in all the fashions he knew, but it would do nothing save pant and sigh and sibilate like amorous boys and girls, and seemed to say only :

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

*My arms, thy arms . . .  
breathless, breathless  
the kiss is hissing . . .  
my arms, thy arms . . .*

‘This is more than pleasant, though it is not my song,’ said Popusnokar, when he had failed to make the third flute do more than this. ‘But it seems as if I were not meant to have a song of my own this season.’ So he bound the three flutes together into one pipe, and this strange melody that he played became famous through all the country :

*Bosom, whom? Bosom, whom?  
And white, white wings.  
The kiss is hissing,  
my arms, thy arms,  
breathless, breathless;  
wing, wing, white wing,  
my arms, thy arms,  
and bosom, bosom, whom?*

And that is how, as our grandfathers tell us, the first pan-pipe of flutes came to be made.

•      •      •

---

---

## *A Woman's Artifice*

**I**N THE STORIES OF OUR GREATEST ANTIQUITY it is related that there were once a husband and wife who had lived together for a long time, and that the wife had a lover whom she was always bringing in to sleep with her in her husband's house.

One day the husband left her and went to dig tubers in the forest ; at the hottest hour of the day, in order to rest himself, he entered a memorial that had been raised to the Neakta.\*

Now it so happened that on the same day his wife, driven light-headed by love for her lover and caught up in a violent desire to be rid of her husband, went to make offerings to the Neakta. You may be sure that the good man was surprised to see her enter.

'What is she seeking here ?' he said to himself.

He hid behind the back of a statue and waited in silence, while the woman lit sticks of incense and made this invocation to the Neakta :

'I do not want my husband any more. I have chosen a lover. I beg the Neakta to cause my husband's death ; if they do so I will give them a pig.'

Disguising his voice, the husband answered from his hiding-place :

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

‘If you have a lover and wish to get rid of your husband without difficulty, you must return home, procure a broody hen with her eggs, cook these, and give them to your husband to eat. Then he will surely die.’

Being quite convinced that this advice had really come from the Neakta, the woman hastened home. She bought a broody hen with her eggs, and boiled them all together, so that she might get rid of her husband and live at peace with her lover.

At twilight the husband also returned, saying : ‘What have you got for me to eat ? I am very hungry.’

The woman brought him the hen and a pot of rice. The man ate the lot and then lay down groaning and pretending to be very ill. Being sure that he would soon perish as the Neakta had promised, his wife opened the door, brought in her lover and lay with him upon the mat.

While the lovers were whispering love talk to each other, the husband sat up and called his wife, saying : ‘I am trembling with cold. Go and draw water and put it on the fire that I may have a bath.’

The lover was terrified at seeing the husband thus rise up and, as there was no possibility of flight, insinuated himself into a great empty jar

## *A Woman's Artifice*

that stood by the mat, and hid there until his rival should go to sleep.

The husband had seen this manœuvre, but he said no word and gave no sign. Instead he cried to his wife : ‘ I am cold, I am very cold. Heat the water, that I may bathe. The bath will hasten the work of death upon me.’

Hearing her husband speak of death, the woman was delighted at so exact a fulfilment of her prayers.

When a great basin of water was well boiling, the husband said again : ‘ Now fetch a jar of cold water to mix with this.’

The woman went out with the jar, and as soon as she had disappeared, her husband rose, took the boiling cauldron from the fire and emptied it into the jar, so that the lover died without a cry. Then the man lay down again, and continued to groan and play the invalid.

On her return the woman saw her lover’s head emerging from the jar ; this had happened because of the contraction of the scalded muscles. The woman whispered : ‘ Get down. He is not asleep yet.’

Her lover did not move. She stretched out her hand to push him back into the jar, and one of his ears came off in her fingers. Then she understood that her husband had killed her lover with boiling water, but she said nothing.

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

She dragged the jar towards her husband and set the cold water down beside it. But the husband did not take his bath. He said : ‘ I am feeling better. Let us lie down.’

• • •

At first the woman did not know how to get rid of her lover’s body, then she thought : ‘ There are four robbers in this village who commit thefts in all the houses by day and night. I will bring it about that these rascals carry away the corpse and leave it in the forest.’

She went and borrowed several embroidered kilts and silk cloaks, and these she stretched about the house as if to dry.

The four robbers saw this display, and said among themselves : ‘ How has so mean a woman come by such costly things ? We always thought her poor. To-night we must come without fail and rob her.’

In the evening the woman took down the stuffs which she had put out to dry, folded them and returned them to those neighbours from whom she had borrowed them. Then, with a long cord and many windings, she strongly fastened down the cover of the jar in which the corpse remained. Finally, she went out, taking her husband with her on some excuse.

Seeing the house empty, the four robbers slipped within and rummaged all the corners, without

## *A Woman's Artifice*

finding anything worth their trouble. They tried to open the jar, but the cover was too well fastened. They thought : ‘ All those valuable stuffs must be in the jar. We will not waste time on opening it here. Let us carry it away as it is.’

They slid two bamboos beneath the cords, took the ends over their shoulders, and bore their booty into the forest. When they were very far from the village, they cut the cords and uncovered the jar. One of them felt with his hand and, touching the hair of the dead, cried : ‘ It is full of spun silk ! ’ Then another felt and, coming upon the place of the lost ear, cried out : ‘ It is a corpse ! ’

The third did not wish to believe him. He also put in his hand, touched the breast of the dead man, and recognised it for what it was. Then the four fled in fury, seeing how they had been played upon by a woman and had been made with great efforts to carry away an inconvenient body. They said to each other :

‘ We will watch this woman. If ever we meet her alone we will seize her and drub her soundly, to punish her and to cure her of any desire to deceive us again.’

. . .

Some time afterwards the woman went down to the river to make certain purchases, as a

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

Chinese junk-bazaar had anchored at the bank there.

When she had got half-way, she found herself surrounded by the four robbers ; these leapt upon her with one accord, volleying insults, and were about to beat her dreadfully, but she said :

‘ How will you advantage by beating me ? Rather come with me, as I am going to receive some money that the Chinese captain owes me. When I am paid, we will share and share alike.’

The four robbers were persuaded by this reasoning, but as they walked with the woman, she made these suggestions : ‘ All four of you must stay on the bank while I go down alone into the junk. When you see me signal with my hand, come on board and you shall have plenty of money.’

She went down into the junk and said to the master : ‘ The four men I have brought with me are slaves of my own. If you would like to buy them, I am ready to sell.’

‘ I should like to buy,’ answered the Chinese.

‘ How much do you want ? ’

‘ Two bars of silver each.’

‘ I will give you one bar and a half a man.’

‘ I accept,’ said the woman. ‘ I will go on shore now, while you get them down. But be careful,





## *A Woman's Artifice*

for they are sure to want to follow me back. When they are on board, you should have them strongly chained.'

The Chinese paid the agreed price, and the woman left the after deck-house of the junk and signalled to the robbers to come down, at the same time showing them the silver she had received. Supposing that she was calling them to the division which they had agreed upon, they came on board, while she disappeared beneath the deck-house. But scarcely had they set foot upon the boat when they were seized by the sailors and chained down in the bottom of the hold.

Meanwhile, the woman left the deck-house by the opposite door, climbed to the bank and disappeared.

Night surprised the woman while she was still far from her village, and, because she did not dare to pursue her way in the dark for fear of panthers, she climbed into a high tree standing beside the path, rolled herself up in the topmost branches and went to sleep.

The four robbers, chained in the hold of the junk, said among themselves : 'That woman is really intelligent. First she got us to carry a corpse into the forest, and now she has sold us. Is she always to have the last word ? '

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

Anger redoubled their strength, they broke their chain, reached the bank and escaped into the night.

Chance led them to the foot of the tree into which the woman had climbed, and they in their turn decided to pass the night in it. Three of them installed themselves in the main branches and the fourth climbed up to the top, where he found the woman. Boiling with rage, he said to her : ‘ So there you are, vile wretch ! This time your account shall be paid in full. This time you shall die. You have made it a jest to deceive us, now save yourself if you can.’

But the woman made her silver shine in the rays of the moon, saying in a low voice : ‘ Be quiet ! The three others must not know that I am here. Take me for your woman, and we will have this silver to live on. I know where I can get plenty more. It will be of more profit to you to keep me as a companion than to do me harm.’

The robber slid along close to the woman and took her in his arms, saying : ‘ Little sister, anyone may see that you are clever. Twice you have fooled your elder brothers. But our destiny has marked us out as husband and wife. We two together should have no difficulty in living at the expense of others.’

So saying, he began to cover her with kisses, and she let him do so. Then she said pettishly :

## *A Woman's Artifice*

‘I am afraid that you do not love me truly. It is with all my heart that I love you.’

‘Your elder brother loves you very dearly. You do not know your brother’s heart. Do you wish me to bind myself to you with an oath? What would you have me do to prove my love?’

‘If you love me with a single heart, let us kiss tongues.’

She put out her tongue first and leaned towards the robber, and he kissed it. Then the robber did the same, but the woman, making as if to kiss, seized his tongue between her teeth and bit it so hard that she completely severed it. Then she pushed him away with both her hands. He fell from the top of the tree to the ground below, uttering inarticulate cries.

The three other robbers heard this commotion and imagined that the Chinese from the junk were on their trail. They leapt from the tree, crying : ‘Alarm ! Alarm ! The Chinese are upon us ! Fly, fly !’

He whose tongue had been bitten out called after them, saying : ‘The woman is in the tree ! Come and catch her !’

But, because his tongue was missing, his words were unintelligible, and his companions thought that he was speaking Chinese ; therefore they had no other thought than to save their lives, and fled into the forest.

## *Love Tales of Cambodia*

The woman then came down from the tree, holding the silver in her scarf. She carried it to her husband and lived at peace with him for the rest of her life.

---

## NOTES

*Love Tales of Cambodia.* I have tried to give an example of every kind of Cambodian tale which at all introduces a sex motive, and this accounts for the rather startling differences of tone and outlook in so short a collection. I have selected and translated from *Légendes Cambodgiennes que m'a contées le Gouverneur Khieu* by G.-H. Monod, *Popusnokar*, *Panurge Cambodgien* by Dr. Alex Hugo, and *Contes du Cambodge* by Auguste Pavie.

PAGE			
I	<i>obedient to us</i>		It is the custom for an accepted suitor to enter the service of the girl's family for a few months.
3 16	<i>beneath the house</i> <i>Popusnokar</i>		It would be built on piles. The figure of this mystical buffoon and poet should not be identified with the demi-god of the same name, son of a diva and a poor Chinaman, who is still venerated as the legendary builder of Angkor. The long story of the raising of the city reveals just as strongly marked a character in its hero, and one entirely different. The name is the sole thing, as far as I know, that the two figures have in common.

Apart from Pra En (Indra) and the genii, three classes from Hindoo mythology take part in this tale : the Yacks, fierce and cannibalistic giants with the power of flying ; the Nagas, peaceable folk with human bodies and serpents' tails ; and the Kruth or Garonda, the heavenly bird of Indra, an implacable foe of the snake people, often assuming a more or less human shape. I have been tempted to choose this tale because it seemed to me that English was especially well suited to give some idea of the impressionist verses of the original.

Genii.

*Songs of the Love  
Nights of Lao*



---

---

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THIS collection of verses is intended to give some idea of the quality of strong and crude imagination which informs the folk-song of the Laos or Shans. They are sung for the most part on wan-pak nights, or nights of what the ethnographer calls "customary licence." In the first and sixth sections a band of youths is singing to a band of girls, in the second a band of girls is replying; the songs of the third, fourth and fifth sections are sung either by some single member of one band publicly to a single member of another, or on ordinary occasions of wooing; those of exile in the last section are sung by men on their long canoe journeys. The various kinds are discussed, together with the conditions of their singing, in the terminal essay: Indo-China, and a few further examples may be found in my Garden of Bright Waters. I have selected and translated from Chansons Populaires de l'Indo-Chine by Edouard and Pierre Reboux, Farrère's Mœurs du Laos and Les Chansons de Sao Van Di by Jean Ajalbert.



---

---

## C O N T E N T S

*Introductory Note* 79

*Men Together:*

1. *If the girl does not want us* 85
2. *We have offered as many benzoin sticks* 85
3. *The girls of Luang-Prabang* 86
4. *Only the girls of Luang-Prabang* 86
5. *The pomegranate must throw his jellies* 87
6. *Let all of us who loved her* 87

*Women Together:*

1. *We are weary of sleeping alone* 88
2. *When the tempest of a boy's love* 88
3. *The rain is falling* 88
4. *Shall the flower at the tree's top* 89
5. *When we climb into the branches* 89
6. *You did not complain* 89

*A Man Alone:*

1. *I am a bird foundered by the storm* 91
2. *Sometimes my heart* 91
3. *I sleep alone* 92
4. *I was as joyful as a long-armed ape* 92
5. *Another girl is leaning her elbow* 92
6. *The sun begins to bleed* 93
7. *I am as a thirsting bird* 93

---

---

*A Woman Alone :*

1. *To sleep on the warm saffron bed* 95
2. *I love him as I love my mouth* 95
3. *You said you wished* 96
4. *If the arms and the legs of the lover* 96
5. *I saw you endlessly* 96

*Man and Woman Together :*

1. *Do not be proud* 98
2. *My heart is a river* 98
3. *I will climb the ladder* 99
4. *I am a sad buffalo* 99

*Diatribes :*

1. *If scarves could speak* 101
2. *Even if you are full of ulcers* 101
3. *Now the children may come* 102
4. *Each woman has a belly* 102

*Canoe Men :*

1. *Away, away O* 103
2. *She gleamed like the thinning moon* 103
3. *Where the girls sit cross-legged* 104
4. *Those who have stayed at home* 104
5. *There* 105
6. *We have burned gilt prayer-papers* 105
7. *This is no matter* 106









11

---

---

*Men Together*

I

IF THE GIRL DOES NOT WANT US  
we will take the mother,  
and give joy to all.  
Whether the breasts be as slight as citrons  
we would make love,  
whether the breasts be as great as pumpkins  
as wrinkled as elephants  
as soft as cooked rice,  
a woman is always a woman  
and we would make love.

2

We have offered as many benzoin sticks  
before the Buddhas  
as there are hairs on you,  
we are little dogs  
nosing the foot of the ladder  
that goes up to you,  
we are red parakeets  
screaming about a mango  
that a swan is eating.

*Songs of the Love Nights of Lao*

3

The girls of Luang-Prabang  
have equal thighs  
as clean as gilded pillars  
and equal breasts like gold bowls,  
and long fingers  
like slender onion stems.

Their eyes are black stars or blue stars  
or green stars above round moons,  
once we have breathed their breath  
no flower has any scent for us.  
We could find nothing as beautiful  
across five thousand lives  
as the girls of Luang-Prabang.

4

Only the girls of Luang-Prabang  
know how to love,  
they climb from man to man  
over all the district  
as green lianas cross a jungle  
from tree to tree,  
and that is how  
they keep their soft round heels  
so golden.

## *Men Together*

5

The pomegranate must throw his jellies  
in his season  
and the hot honey drip over  
from the combs of the wild bees ;  
water must spill into the pool  
below the rock  
and the firework burst from its wrapping  
to fulfil the night ;  
and we must die  
if we do not drain into the girls  
of the little city.

6

*(mourning)*

Let all of us who loved her  
paint great red phalloi  
upon her catafalque  
and weep and say :  
Her hair fell to her ankles  
and she could never  
lie down alone.

•      •      •

---

---

*Women Together*

I

WE ARE WEARY OF SLEEPING ALONE  
without caresses,  
but it is better to carry  
a lacquered basket of champaks on the hip  
than a child without a father.

2

When the tempest of a boy's love  
comes up about us  
suddenly  
our thoughts and our blue and orange scarves  
are whirled away together.  
Who has not seen  
a great wind drive the orchids  
and birds together from a tree  
in a coloured storm ?

3

The rain is falling through the roof,  
where is a boy  
to fill our gaps for us ?

## *Women Together*

4

Shall the flower at the tree's top  
bend down to know  
the scorpion hidden in her root  
or water flowing headlong  
turn back to know  
what water follows ?

5

When we climb into the branches  
to pluck a flower  
the whole tree shakes for it ;  
but he went to her house  
and banged and jolted all the family ghosts  
with his large love-making.

6

*(to those in labour)*

You did not complain  
when you were belly to belly with him,  
so close that the garland of your hair  
and his ear's red jasmine  
were but one flower.  
Why complain now ?

*Songs of the Love Nights of Lao*

The buffaloes used to bellow  
when they heard the floor shaking  
for fear the house would fall on them.  
Why complain now ?  
Your skins  
must have been harder than turtle-shell  
to sustain such rubbing,  
and even so  
the tattooing on his thighs  
was worn away.  
Why complain now ?

•      •      •

---

---

## *A Man Alone*

### I

I AM A BIRD FOUNDERED BY THE STORM  
and the rain has limed my wings,  
I am only resting in my journey  
and must depart.  
When I am dry  
I will rise as if with new feathers  
to come more swiftly  
to sing about her hut.  
It is mouldering  
and the bolt shuts ill,  
the roof is pierced  
and a rung has gone from the ladder,  
but it is the nest of the turtle-dove  
of the city.

### 2

Sometimes my heart  
is as great as a jack-wood fruit  
and sometimes as small  
as a water-chestnut  
because each part of her  
seems to be cut in a gold slice  
out of the moon.

*Songs of the Love Nights of Lao*

3

I sleep alone  
through the careless nights,  
a thickset forest  
with no track in it.

Spare me the hope of your body,  
for that is as a wind brushing the trees ;  
it passes away,  
the leaves have none of it.

4

I was as joyful as a long-armed ape  
tearing up red hibiscus  
in the forest.

You lured me with cinnamon-apples,  
I was very shy,  
but you lured me with cinnamon apples  
until I fell into the gold snare  
of your joined arms,  
and now you mock me.

5

Another girl is leaning her elbow  
on the patterns of his thigh

### *A Man Alone*

as they watch the holy fireworks ;  
another girl is feeding him grasshoppers  
fried in egg paste.  
Do we not give the bodies of our dead  
to the river  
because there is no earth  
in flood time ?  
Therefore, though you once hated me,  
come now.

### 6

The sun begins to bleed  
on the spikes of the palm trees  
and now he falls  
a bursting crimson pomegranate  
from all the branches ;  
your mat is the world to-night  
and you are the sun setting  
and I am the darkness  
coming down over you.

### 7

*(drunken)*

I am as a thirsting bird  
that seeks the breast of his mother

*Songs of the Love Nights of Lao*

and demands milk with cries ;  
the son of the elephant, even I  
am a bird of paradise  
seeking the breast of his mother.

. . .

---

---

*A Woman Alone*

I

**T**O SLEEP ON THE WARM SAFFRON BED  
of his body  
is more to me than a present  
of ant-eater shell ;  
he is as sweet and strong  
as a wood of cardamom trees,  
the breath of his kissing  
is white and rose lime to me.

2

I love him as I love my mouth ;  
all day my mouth is happiness.  
All day it is chewing betel  
or eating pleasantly  
or smoking tobacco  
or laughing or making songs.  
Only in sleep  
my mouth was good for nothing ;  
but now it goes on pleasuring me  
all the night,  
for I drink the breath and the skin and the hair  
of him who loves me.

*Songs of the Love Nights of Lao*

3

You said you wished  
the lacquer and the sandal trees  
to grow into a parasol  
for me,  
you said you wished  
the sky to be my blue umbrella  
with gold tracings,  
but you did not say you wished yourself  
to cover me.

4

If the arms and the legs of the lover  
hollow about my tender flesh  
such furrows as a liana leaves upon  
the tree she loves,  
surely the points of my breasts  
on the breast of my lover  
shall be as sharpened bamboo branches  
piercing an elephant.

5

I saw you endlessly in my sleep  
wrigging golden about my thoughts

*A Woman Alone*

as the dragons writhe golden  
round Pagoda beams ;  
as the small Buddhas  
are brought out to be washed  
under the Pagoda fig trees  
my thoughts are brought forth from me  
at waking  
to be washed in you.

. . .

---

---

*Man and Woman Together*

I

**D**O NOT BE PROUD  
for though you are girl moons,  
eclipse can eat your silver.  
You are lianas needing a strong tree  
or you would creep for ever  
and not see the sun.

How can a little black crow  
know the gold heron  
hiding behind its wing there ?  
You say we are lianas  
and need a strong tree :  
it is not a piece of drowned canoe  
we need  
and not a branch  
soft from the river slime.  
How can a fish in backwaters  
fly up and love the moon ?

2

My heart is a river between its banks  
after much rain,  
because I love him.

*Man and Woman Together*

My heart is no river  
lessening after the rain,  
but a forest not altogether of this earth  
where there are always leaves and flowers  
and fruit for her.

3

I will climb the ladder  
your feet have so often touched lightly  
and ask for you  
from your father and mother.

Do not ask me of my father  
for he loves me  
and would rather give his opium pipe,  
nor of my mother  
for she has forgotten desire.

Then I must die.

You need not die  
if you will give me a yellow orchid  
for my ear  
and drink my breath  
and ask me of myself.

4

I am a sad buffalo  
because I know a garden of coolness

*Songs of the Love Nights of Lao*

with a fountain bordered by fine grass.  
I would browse on the fine grass  
and drink at the fountain,  
but she tells me that the gate is shut  
and the parents hard to please.  
There are other buffaloes  
snuffling about her hedge,  
but if she let me browse on the fine grass  
and drink of the fountain  
they would go away,  
nor would the parents deny me  
if once their daughter  
had opened her gate to me.

My garden is closed to the buffaloes  
save one ;  
he shall not hunger or thirst  
at the door of my garden ;  
he shall be made glad with the soft grass  
and glad at the fountain.  
If my father and mother  
ask about the noise of us,  
I will hide him with my hair  
and spread it over the one body  
of our two bodies  
and say the buffaloes are fighting  
under the house.

. . .

---

---

*Diatribes*

I

IF SCARVES COULD SPEAK  
they would have much to say  
of the breasts of women.

We think we have one with paps as smooth  
and yellow as gold bowls,  
but they are as black below their saffron  
as grease on a pot.

If the jasmine could tell his adventures  
among their hair  
he would speak of great cotton pads,  
and if skirts had eyes  
they could tell many things.

2

Even if you are full of ulcers  
or old and hairy,  
the proudest girl  
will let you see and feel  
the two halves of her bottom  
for a roll of cloth  
and snuff her from the forehead bar  
to the ankles bones

## *Songs of the Love Nights of Lao*

for a gilt ring.

It is ridiculous

that *sao* should mean both *virgin* and *twenty*  
in such a kingdom.

3

Now the children may come  
to bathe in safety  
at the pool by the coco-trees,  
for the two daughters of the bee-hunter  
chose to wash there  
and all the crocodiles  
have gone up stream.

4

Each woman has a belly  
stretched like a gong,  
but gongs make a great sound  
when they are beaten.

I am glad the bellies of women  
are not as sonorous as gongs,  
else all our kingdom would be one perpetual  
uproar.

---

---

## *Canoe Men*

### I

A WAY, AWAY O,  
A  
it is hard to paddle  
yet we must paddle there  
to make our sticky rice  
and lie down on the bank  
by nightfall.

It is hard to paddle  
away, away o,  
for she does not care to lie alone  
and the flower she gave you  
already smells of nothing.  
Throw it away, away o,  
it is hard to paddle.

NATIONAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM  
BAKADUR

### 2

She gleamed like the thinning moon  
when I went away  
now she will be shining in brightness  
at full by the flower hedges ;  
but there are no wings to be had  
on Mekong river.

*Songs of the Love Nights of Lao*

3

Where the girls sit cross-legged  
before their delicacies,  
sometimes a young elephant comes unpunished  
and sacks the market with his tusk  
and takes his choice  
being of the King's service.  
Being of love's service  
I also will come soon  
where the girls sit cross-legged.

4

Those who have stayed at home  
walk with the girls now  
by hedges of harlot-flowers  
opening to the dusk.  
The men weave compliments  
and all the most defiant of the women  
are now thrown down.  
As beasts into the grass-covered pits at night  
on to the bamboo points below,  
the women fall now  
but do not find the bamboo points  
too hard for them.

## *Canoe Men*

5

There

the girls answer the love couplets  
with quick answers  
and sometimes tenderly,  
here only the bull-frogs answer  
coughing in the rushes.

We see nothing but the smoke of our pipes  
and the shadows of the canoes  
that must take us on.

The moon is as saffron  
as the breasts of the town girls  
but it has no sharp end of a lemon-shaped  
bud of a gold rose.

6

We have burned gilt prayer-papers  
down stream  
and have not eaten to-night  
because of the ghost of the rapids,  
but opium gives us great wings  
and sleep a swiftness to come to you  
greater than fishes'.

*Songs of the Love Nights of Lao*

7

(towing)

This is no matter of proud canoe men  
steering with assurance  
through the rapids.

We are yoked like plough buffaloes  
in a rice-field,  
and the girls would not have us  
in their houses now,  
they would think we were devils  
because of the red tattooing  
of the ropes.

•      •      •









